



Sustainability at UW–Madison

2022–2023



Strategic Initiatives

The Office of Sustainability rolled out a [new interactive dashboard](#) that helps users explore sustainability data and track the university's progress on topics such as greenhouse gas emissions, energy use, affordability, sustainability research, and campus engagement.

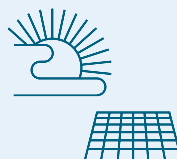
The UW Zero Waste initiative employed four undergraduate project assistants, completed Phase 2 of the Atlas Zero Waste program, provided assistance with the new [food waste collection pilot](#), and [solicited input](#) from campus on strategic planning.

UW–Madison launched a pilot implementation of [My Green Lab](#), a globally recognized certification program aimed at enhancing the sustainability of research facilities. Led by student interns at the Office of Sustainability, the pilot supported seven campus labs and 60 employees in pursuing certification and reducing resource intensity.

Campus made important progress on sustainability pilot projects supported by a \$3.2M strategic allocation from the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Finance and Administration, including:

- The Grounds team [rolled out electric riding lawnmowers](#) to replace existing gas-powered machines, reducing emissions and noise while improving the campus experience.
- An advanced planning study is being developed to investigate opportunities to decarbonize campus district energy while maintaining safety, reliability, and efficiency of services.
- 44 additional solar panels (11.7 kW) were installed on the roof of Gordon Dining and Event Center to fill the capacity of the [current solar inverter](#) and raise awareness about renewable energy efforts on campus.

UW–Madison is working with Alliant Energy to plan a [small-scale solar and agricultural research project](#) at the Kegonsa Research Campus outside of Stoughton, WI. The project, which received a Planetary Health Research Team Award and a [Research Forward Grant](#), will break ground this fall and generate enough electricity to power approximately 450 homes. Office of Sustainability staff members are managing the project for UW–Madison, which will receive Renewable Energy Credits and revenue for future sustainability initiatives.



61M

kilowatt-hours (kWh) of renewable electricity procured by UW–Madison from campus rooftop solar installations, the O'Brien Solar Fields, and utility partnerships



500+

volunteers who helped improve and maintain the Lakeshore Nature Preserve, 70% of which were UW students, faculty, and staff



96

students who participated in the Green Fund process during 2022–2023



191

tons of food scraps diverted from the landfill thanks to the Food Waste Collection Pilot Program



Students in Sustainability

The [Office of Sustainability Student Intern Program](#) fielded its largest cohort ever while providing green certification services, engaging the campus community, and supporting partner organizations, including:

- Working with 61 [campus offices](#) housing 680 employees
- Consulting on 10 [campus events](#) that drew over 11,000 total attendees
- Hosting three [Amplifying BIPOC Voices in Sustainability](#) events
- Producing 11 episodes of the [SustainUW Podcast](#)
- Auditing waste at four women's hockey and soccer games
- Co-hosting [Sustain-a-Bash](#) and [Earth Week](#) with dozens of partners and events

Students submitted a record-setting 13 project proposals to the [UW-Madison Green Fund](#), nine of which received funding. Joining 34 active [projects](#), the new efforts include a student-run clothing sharing and repair space, 20 solar smart bus shelters, and an aquaponics system at the D.C. Smith Greenhouse.

The Nelson Institute and Office of Sustainability launched a new [corporate sustainability intern program](#), which provides students with real-world sustainability experience in a corporate environment while furnishing companies with a broad talent pool of excellent undergraduate and graduate students.

The student organization [Re-Wear It](#) organized clothing swaps every other week at locations across campus, often in collaboration with other RSOs and departments on campus. With support from the Green Fund, Re-Wear It helped students swap 3,637 clothing items in 2022–2023, diverting 2,965 pounds of waste from the landfill and saving 4.6 million gallons of water that would have gone to producing new clothing.

Regional Leadership

In a [record-setting cohort](#), UW–Madison's UniverCity Year (UCY) program is partnering with nine communities across Wisconsin during the 2022–2025 academic years. The communities applied to UCY to address a range of issues, including public health, sustainability, social support services, electric vehicles, historic preservation, and equity.

Thanks to new funding from the National Endowment for the Humanities and led by UW–Madison faculty member Kasey Keeler, an interdisciplinary group of UW–Madison faculty, staff, and graduate students [will create](#) educational modules about the expropriation and dispossession of Indigenous lands by land-grant universities.

Dr. Missy Nergard, director of sustainability at UW–Madison, has been [named](#) chairperson for the Wisconsin Advisory Council on Building Sustainability, which will review all building and construction codes and [provide recommendations](#) on “changes that would increase safety, resiliency, and sustainability.”



Students point to one of the new solar-powered displays installed in a campus bus shelter in partnership between the UW–Madison Green Fund, Transportation Services, Engineering faculty, and the student organizations Enactus and Helios.



Research and Scholarship

The first annual [UW–Madison Sustainability Symposium](#) featured a speech by Chancellor Jennifer L. Mnookin, a keynote address by associate professor Andrea Hicks, and a series of flash talks and poster presentations by students, faculty, and staff.

UW researchers are leading the way on PFAS research, including modeling [how it flows](#) through the ground and [how it accumulates](#) in different forms in freshwater.

Graduate students Elizabeth Berg, Becky Rose, and Sara Pabich are [tracking extreme heat events](#) in six cities, including Madison and Milwaukee. Working with climatologist Larry Kalkstein as a part of the [Wisconsin Heat Health Network](#), their research will inform a warning system in Madison and Milwaukee based on health outcomes that considers mortality and weather data rather than only meteorology.

Researchers at the Great Lakes Bioenergy Research Center are working to [develop plant-based fuels](#) that are a key piece of the nation's blueprint for decarbonizing transportation. Such fuels use carbon taken from the atmosphere instead of deposits trapped underground for millions of years, making them carbon neutral. These new biofuels and chemicals, which can be used to make valuable products like polyester, nylon and even acetaminophen, represent a multi-trillion dollar industry.

The Office of Sustainability [launched a new “virtual” sustainability course attribute](#) in order to meet student interest in the easy identification of courses related to sustainability and to provide data about sustainability content in coursework at UW–Madison.

Honors and Recognitions

UW–Madison has been [recognized for employee commuting](#) by the Climate Champions program, operated by the Dane County Office of Energy and Climate. Approximately 40% of UW–Madison employees use active transportation modes to get to and from campus most or all of the time, according to a recent campus [survey on multimodal commutes](#).

UW–Madison [earned](#) the Bee Campus USA Certification, making it one of 140 Bee Campus affiliates nationwide. [Bee Campus USA](#), an initiative of the Xerces Society, “provides a framework for campus communities to work together to conserve native pollinators by increasing the abundance of native plants, providing nest sites, and reducing the use of pesticides.”

The UW Biotechnology Center received the 2023 Greenovation Award from Kimberly–Clark Professional in recognition of sustainability efforts that include diverting 529 pounds of nitrile glove waste from the landfill.



UW–Madison has earned two STARS Silver ratings (2018 and 2021) for its sustainability performance and is targeting a STARS Gold rating by 2025.



Engagement and Outreach

The Office of Sustainability sponsored ten [student organizations](#) on campus, coordinated “[Office Hours](#)” to give students the opportunity to offer feedback and get involved in campus initiatives, and provided support for the first [Student Sustainability Leaders Meeting](#).

The inaugural [Sustainability Writing Awards](#), hosted by the Office of Sustainability, platformed student voices and their impactful role in uniting diverse perspectives, cultivating resilience, and driving action.

To cap [Earth Week](#) celebrations—which [featured](#) 19 partners and over two dozen events—the UW Arboretum, Green Fund, several student organizations, and other local partners organized [EmPOWERing Youth for a Brighter Future](#), which brought together more than fifty high school and college students to discuss the challenge of fighting climate change while also building community and celebrating Earth Day.



COURTESY OF UNIVERSITY HOUSING

207 volunteers spent 413 hours helping residents sort their donations and recycling during [Sustainability Move Out](#), an effort organized by University Housing with support from the Office of Sustainability and many other partner organizations. Sustainability Move Out diverted over 150,000 pounds of material from the landfill in 2023.

On, Wisconsin: The Year Ahead

In fall 2023, the Nelson Institute for Environmental Studies will launch a new Sustainability Research Hub as well as a graduate certificate in sustainability.

Building on its longstanding [Certificate in Business, Environment, and Social Responsibility](#), the Wisconsin School of Business is hiring for a senior faculty member in corporate social responsibility and will launch a Social Responsibility Badge for its Professional MBA program in fall 2023 as well as a new sustainable capitalism course in spring 2024.

Danish program participants and UW–Madison scholarship students in the [Scan Design Fellowship Program](#) will participate in educational and environmental sustainability activities in conjunction with the Office of Sustainability beginning in fall 2023.



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